

strips with its beak and send the bark flying everywhere.

The woodpeckers were not seen by this observer after early November 1998 and it is likely they disappeared with colder weather. Exploration through Kelvingrove after November no longer revealed fresh "beak-work" an element to their discovery again in mid-autumn.

Approximately 10 hours or more of viewing woodpeckers was achieved in Kelvingrove, a parkland where the woodpeckers seem to have been little recorded before and 1998 was therefore a significant year for parkland bird life.

I acknowledge my mother, Carol Aitken, Sheila Russell and Richard Sutcliffe for assistance in recording the activities of the Great Spotted Woodpecker in Kelvingrove.

Sperm Whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) in Scapa Flow, Orkney

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The Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* was rare in Orkney waters in the 19th century according to Buckley and Harvie-Brown (1891). It continued to be rare in the 20th century up until 1975, with only one definite record (Booth and Booth, 1994). Since then it has occurred more frequently with a number of both sightings and strandings, although some of the latter are of whales that have been dead for some time before coming ashore on Orkney. The majority of sightings have come from within Scapa Flow, an area of sheltered water well known as an anchorage for naval vessels in both First and Second World Wars and now used by oil tankers. Lying in the southern part of the Orkney archipelago, Scapa Flow extends for approximately 120 square miles, it has a maximum depth of 62 metres and a mean depth of approximately 35 metres.

The first report was in October 1976 when 6 or 7 whales were seen on several occasions, during one day, from an aircraft that was making flights across the Flow. The next sighting was again from an aircraft when a large whale, about 18 metres in length, was seen on 22nd September 1981; it was present for only a few hours. On 22nd February 1993, 6 whales arrived and stayed for several weeks. They were all thought to be immature males, 4 being about 15 metres in length and 2 slightly smaller. The whales spent their time within the deeper waters of the Flow, often resting with parts of their heads protruding above the water. From a distance they looked like large barrels floating on the surface of the sea. Their continued presence in the Flow became a cause for concern. Not only was there a risk of collision with shipping but also of accidental stranding. On 25th March a successful operation was launched, using a flotilla of boats to shepherd the whales out of Scapa Flow and into the Pentland Firth.

There were no more reports until 1998 when 7 were seen on 14th April. Varying in length between 11 and 15 metres, these were also thought to be immature males. They were still present on the 15th, so an attempt was made to monitor their movements. Unfortunately strong winds during the next few days made it very difficult to keep track of the whales, with even the sheltered waters of the Flow being rough. The last definite sighting was on the morning of the 21st April but it was not until the 24th that conditions were calm enough to carry out an aerial survey to confirm that the whales had left. It will be

interesting to see whether Scapa Flow has any further visits from Sperm Whales in the next few years.

References

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An Otter at Cadder

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On the 28th. March 1998 I encountered an otter in the area of the old Roman Fort at Cadder. The otter was first seen on the opposite bank of the canal where it travelled about 50 metres, stopping and exploring parts of the bank and then hurrying on. It entered the canal eventually and surface swam out into the middle of the canal: to my surprise the otter swam towards me. I stopped walking along the canal bank and the otter landed and came up onto the bank about 4 metres from me and reared up, looking at me. It maintained this pose and sniffed the air. It did not appear to be put out by my presence, though it made a "chirping" noise. The otter then sat back down and stopped and continued looking in my direction. Eventually it sniffed the air again and after a soft whistle, it wandered past me and into the cover of grass and plantings. The encounter lasted ten minutes or more. At Cadder Fort the canal follows a course along the bank of the hill with a very steep descent to open farmland running across to the River Kelvin; it was later possible to watch the otter travel across the farmland to the Kelvin, going about its business.

Don Martin, Reference and Information Librarian for East Dunbartonshire Leisure & Cultural Services, reported seeing an otter on the Kelvin, about the Park Burn, Kirkintilloch, a week or so previous to my encounter and it may have been the same animal.

The otter was classical in appearance conforming in its general behaviour to the description available in texts such as Southern's "The handbook of British mammals" (1964). What was impressive was the otter's acceptance of my presence which was quite at variance to ill-tempered encounters with mink along the canal and in truth I was taken totally aback with this close encounter with an otter.

Parkland change and its impact on Grey Squirrel life in Kelvingrove

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The cutting down of trees and cover in Kelvingrove as part of attempts to rehabilitate the old park impacted on local life for squirrels. In June 1998 after several "clan" groups of